

When Life Gives You Lemons

A short story by Miriam, 8B

That evening, after I trudged home from the riverbank, I found the vibrant lemons – once dangling boldly under their crescent shaped leaves – lying idly in the fertile soil below. This left nothing but eerie shadows to blanket the vacant tree swaying alone in the luminescence of the night. A crisp breeze caressed the grasses of my family's fields sweetly, leaving behind the fresh aroma of a blossoming spring. The emerald mountains that guarded our land, still carpeted with a snowy dew, revealed the slightest, wispy line of glowing gold as the sun was tucked away with the day. I knew I was late for supper.

I reluctantly sulked up our battered stairs, accompanied by a sinister creak of the aged oak wood that punctuated through the silence. The door was open, and I let myself in. This wasn't the least bit peculiar. Mother always cracked the screen when she cooked – letting the scents of a boiling stew or roasting lamb stream helplessly into the cradling arms of the valley.

But something seemed different. The kitchen was overcome by a freezing silence. I took another step further, noticing the carelessly strooned wooden spoons, bowls, and laddels. Stew. She was making stew. Cutting boards filled with neatly cut beef, diced tomatoes, and onions were overturned – flooding the floor with dinner's morsels. The stove was full ablaze, and a dark cloud of steam was flowing from its prison in the pot. I darted over to turn off the raging stove.

"Careless," I muttered under my breath. Nothing was in order. "Messy." I noted again.

I called out for her, "Mother!" I was only answered by the uncanny wind brushing against our shingles. I raced through the house, tearing through every nook, every cranny, searching for Mother.

There. There, in her room. There. On the floor. Alone. Hands mangled, legs crossed. Still. Eyes shut stiffly. I stood for a moment, scanning her with my eyes for any sign of movement. Nothing.

I looked around the room feebly. And there; something astonishingly peculiar. In the dusty corner, a single light shown from behind the mask of the lampshade. But what lay below it was what intrigued me. A single lemon – was shining even more vibrantly now than I'd ever seen before – even under the highest of mid-day suns.

Then it all happened.

Something beckoned me to the foggy window – now dotted with a foggy dust and drops of sweet rain. Something stirred out in the fields. A dark shadow moved rapidly through the tall grasses, seeming to sway in unison in their elegant dance in the breeze. Then the shadow stopped. Something reached . . . an arm? Next a head was revealed, and then even from afar – I could make out the tinge of glowing eyes. He suddenly changed directions, moving less swiftly back towards the house. Had he heard my screaming?

As he came closer, I noticed a long scar running jaggedly across his battered cheek. Those radiant eyes were a deep brown – filled with fear, danger, and a shivering darkness. He was now only a few feet away from the house.

I then heard the door slam open. Footsteps followed – echoing each other as they began climbing up the main stairs. I stood still. And in mere moments, I was face to face with Him. His battered trench coat was now visible – along with his injured arms dangling powerlessly by his sides. An unkept beard below feathery hair bordered his eerily blank face. My father.

He took a step towards me. I took one apprehensively back.

“Years has it been?” he muttered sinisterly under his breath. I didn’t respond for a few moments. He continued holding my glare as I caught myself.

“Why are you here?” I questioned fiercely.

“Why now, is that any manner to welcome your father?” He slyly returned – almost mockingly.

“Who said you were welcome?” I noted. He bit his lip, and began fingering for something in his pocket. He soon revealed a tattered newspaper article.

“There are some things I haven’t told you, darling.” He said, letting each word slip effortlessly from his lips. “Would you like to sit down?” he continued. I shot him a questioning glance.

“You have some explaining to do,” I spat – holding back tears, “And make it quick.”

We sat down on my mother’s bed – sheets torn and tattered, mismatched and unmade. He slowly pulled the rest of the newspaper article from his pocket. I couldn’t decide what to focus on – my father, the odd paper, or my mother’s dead body that somehow we had disregarded. Charming.

“It was a cold day in December,” he began slowly, “right before your birth. Your mother and I were visiting family in the Midwest. We decided to take a short visit into town. Your mother had some friends expecting to see her back at the old bar she worked at through university. I rode with her on the train all the way to the stop in front of the dingy bar. She told me she had to go alone. Personal, I figured, and I abided. We hadn’t met during this part of her life. She probably had some catching up to do.” He paused suddenly in the story. We both sat quietly, soaking up the silence. He then continued, now grasping onto each word and letting them hiss slightly as they escaped.

“But she didn’t return to our hotel room until well after midnight. And when she did, she reeked of alcohol, and had minor bruises on her arms. Her hair was extremely mangled and her cheeks were stained with tears. I rushed over to comfort her, but she would have none of it. Something went on that night. And I never knew until last week.” We paused again. He held my gaze, trying to express this great truth. He shook slightly. I beckoned him with my hand to continue.

“That night seemed to vanish into the past. She took a shower, and we went to bed. I didn’t think to question it further. And when I brought it up the next day, I was met with silence. I took her out for a nice meal the following night, and everything returned to normal. But after the divorce, I had unbearable nightmares of that night. I needed to know what happened.”

I understood. From my memory, my father had always been deeply in love with my mother. When he vanished after the divorce, I slowly lost all respect for him. I used to sit out on the porch at night, waiting for him to arrive home again in his rusty pickup truck. He never did. I stopped day dreaming when he concluded his story.

“I went back to that city. I talked to those same friends. In that same bar. And they pointed me to . . . Him.” He reluctantly lifted the article at this moment. A man with fair skin, a ruffed beard, and ghostly eyes stared up at me. The caption read *Albert Castellar*.

I snatched the article. My father let me. I skimmed it over, shocked at its content. I let a small gasp escape. Castellar was sentenced to 186 years in prison – for manslaughter, petty theft, bank robbery, grand theft auto, possession of illegal substances or weaponry . . . you name it, he did it. And this particular article was pertaining to his escape. Two nights back.

“He was in love with your mother. And he claims you are his daughter.” He glanced over – tenderly – to my mother’s body.

“It seems I’ve come to late. It seems there was a . . . scuffle.” The rest of his words trailed off into oblivion. I made out: “I came to protect you . . . We can still be safe . . . I know you might not trust me now . . . I’m sorry . . .” But I just stared at my mother. When it came down to it, she was all that mattered to me. She never left. Despite her shadowed past, she was an amazing mother. And more than anything, in this moment, I wanted to be in her arms. I needed to leave.

I bolted out of the house, away from my father. I'm not even sure he noticed in his trance. I slammed the once ajar door shut. I stormed down those rickety stairs. And I tumbled, helplessly, to the base of our vacant lemon tree. And I cried, tears streaming from my bloodshot eyes like waves crashing to the grainy shore. My tears ran from my cheeks to the soil at the tree's base. Flooding. In that moment, all my fear, all my worries trickled away with my tears. And in that moment, I silently prayed for God to bring back the lemons, and bring back my mothers life. Her life made lemons.